MY EYES HAVE A COLD NOSE

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HV1709
C 1944

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HOUSE FOR THE BLIND

Reader's Digest, v. 45, No. 270, c.1
Oct. 1944
HV1709
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My Eyes Have a Cold Nose

Condensed from Survey Midmonthly + *Hector Chevigny*

(With additions by the author)

I MET my eyes some weeks ago. We were formally introduced at the Seeing Eye establishment in Morristown, N. J., to which I had just come for the month of training in the use of a guide dog. My eyes acknowledged the introduction with the kind of snort made only by a friendly male boxer and the touch of a very cold and very broad nose. When told that his name was "Wizard," I said, not too cleverly, "I hope it fits."

Four months before, my vision was as good as anyone's. Then suddenly my retinas began to detach from their proper position. The surgeons did their best, but I was discharged after three months as totally and permanently blind.

I had been a difficult patient. Your friends tell you, soothingly, that everything is going to be all right, but you know that everything isn't going to be all right if you don't do something to make it so.

I was more fortunate than most in my predicament; I had been a writer for 15 years, a profession that does not depend absolutely on vision. I had lost neither my skill nor my knowledge. A good secretary could furnish the connection between these and the page. There remained the problem of mobility. The greatest burden of the blind is often the complete dependence for movement upon the good will of others.

Therefore I needed no urging to consider getting a guide dog. Before I left the Infirmary, my application had been entered at Seeing Eye, Inc., and their representative had called on me. But this does not imply that I was altogether easy in my mind about the efficacy of the dog as the full answer to my problem. It seemed incredible that anyone would dare try crossing, say, Lexington Avenue in New York City at high noon with only a small animal to guide him.

I was familiar enough with the story of Seeing Eye beginning hardly two decades ago at Mrs. Dorothy Eustis' estate in Switzerland and with its 16 years of existence in the United States. I was willing to grant that a dog was the nearest substitute for sight. Trouble was, I had perhaps heard too much. Anything having to do with dogs seems to invite the fabulous touch, and I reserved judgment until the day my dog and I would try that first crossing of Lexington Avenue. I had had dogs and loved them, but even how to break one of chasing cars or teaching one to do anything more useful than bringing home the paper had been beyond me.

I needn't have been so skeptical. Now, although Wizard has his off days when he would rather take a bus than walk in the rain, and so informs me by plain balking, usually he takes

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(Survey Midmonthly, September, '44)

hand in writing peace terms with Germany. In this gathering the Old Man has become a powerful factor. When there are strong differences of opinion he invariably calms the waters. "Now look," he says, raising a magisterial hand. "This is what we're really after." And when he finishes explaining, the issue is always clear.

"He is imperturbable," was one Englishman's tribute. "He is always fair; his reasoning is precise, and he never says anything unless he knows what he's talking about."

"There is a man — your Admiral!" a prominent Frenchman told me. "He is honest, that one. One cannot fool him. But he is always ready to help if one's request is justified."

It was a just accolade, I thought, to a great American.

Thoughts for an Election Year

AMERICA is the only country which has ever held a national election successfully in the midst of an all-out war. We did it in the Civil War and we shall do it again. Yet it imposes great responsibilities upon every citizen.

As the political fever rises, we shall be tempted to behave like spoiled children, calling each other names, attributing to each other the most horrid motives, dividing our national community with unnecessary hatreds. To whatever extent we get viciously angry, to that same extent we shall fail to pool our national wisdom and make the great decisions which lie ahead with the best intelligence the whole nation can bring to bear.

The American people want to do what is right — Republicans and Democrats, labor and business and farmers, blacks and whites, members of all religions. And we can bridge the gap between our desire to do right and our human ignorance of how to do it, if we impose upon ourselves the democratic self-discipline which will help us learn from one another.

Every morning we must remind ourselves that our neighbors may be right, that we may be wrong, or that we may both be wrong, and that if we talk to each other without getting angry we may discover an opinion which is better than either could have devised alone. We tend to talk as if we believed that the other political party, or the other racial background, or the other way of making a living, was something which made our neighbors unfit to take part in a sensible discussion of what we all ought to do; but underneath all the campaign froth we still believe in each other. Why not behave as if we did?

It will be a bad day for democracy when people don't get excited about an election. But there is a difference between excitement and rancor. America must hold a presidential election. It is up to us to decide whether to behave like adults or like brats. If we behave like grownups, and argue with each other only for the sake of increasing our common stock of wisdom, the schoolbooks of the next century will say we were a great generation of Americans, capable of creating an unbreakable national unity at the time of our severest national trial.

— Herbert Agar in *This Week Magazine*

me wherever I want to go. I walk from my home to Fifth Avenue, crossing Lexington, Park and Madison, as safely as I ever did and twice as frequently. Because Wizard needs exercise, I get out more often than I used to. Special legislation in New York State permits us to go together on all transportation systems. The public is stubbornly of the opinion that I am going to get killed in revolving doors, and I always have to explain to someone that I'm not.

We go to restaurants for lunch or dinner. When I am seated, Wizard downs obediently at my feet. Occasionally head waiters are outraged at the very thought of a dog. At such times Wizard and I do not bother to explain that Seeing Eye has taken special pains to show us how to behave at table; we don't argue because other restaurants are glad to have us.

We attract a great deal of attention, but Wizard and I are a couple of hams and we love it. He weighs a little over 60 pounds, has a sort of brindle coat — they tell me — and a curiously black, wrinkled face. He has a habit of keeping his tongue lolled out and exposing his teeth in a way that quickly clears the path for us. His ferocious appearance belies his character, though. I have never heard him bark. He is a sensitive creature, susceptible to moods, and I have to be bright and cheerful with him, or he gets worried about me. When *he* isn't cheerful I worry about *him*, so we are well matched. They have an apt phrase at Seeing Eye: the dog doesn't belong to you, you belong to the dog.

The dogs are not only "trained" to work for the blind, they must be persuaded. And they have to be kept persuaded.

Snow lay on the ground the February day I enrolled with 15 other blind from all parts of the United States. Four of them were Negro, one was a Latin American. Two were service men, four were women. Three were returning after years for their second or third dogs. We were divided into two groups, each with its instructor.

I was taken upstairs to the comfortable room I would share with another, told where to hang my clothes, shown the bathroom, the recreation room and the way to the dining hall. After that I was expected to find things for myself. If you lose a sock or a shoe you can ask someone to help you find it, but you must make your own search first. You butter your own bread, cut your own meat; if you complain that you have never done these things before, you are told it's about time you started.

No one can give a man independence; he must find it for himself. This is part of the philosophy of Seeing Eye. Every important member of the staff has spent at least one month living the life of a blind person, his vision cut off by a close-fitting black mask, until he, too, knows what it is to be without sight. Sympathy, therefore, is not excluded but pity is.

We found this atmosphere curiously refreshing. The staff treated us as complete equals and it was a welcome relief after the condolences of relatives and friends. I had thought the rule a silly one that visitors could see us for only two hours on Saturdays and Sundays. I hadn't counted on going into retreat, too. But the inept touch of the public, which so often

destroys self-confidence, has to be excluded. For Seeing Eye trains not only dogs but people.

The sum total of bad bodily habits brought by individuals to Seeing Eye is often forbiddingly large. They are taught not merely how to walk in confidence with the dog but to walk freely, rapidly and with grace and strength. The student's voice sometimes needs training, for it is the medium of communication between dog and master; habitual gruffness, too much variation of mood expressed in tone, must be corrected.

My first day as a student I spent attending lectures by the chief instructor, William Debetaz, who is the living link with the original work in Switzerland. The next day I met Wizard and my seven classmates were assigned their own dogs. Four were German shepherds, two were Labrador retrievers, and I had one of two boxers.

We spent two days getting acquainted with our dogs. Our reactions varied with our temperaments and experience. Four of the students had never had dogs before and were unsure of themselves. The rest of us petted and praised our dogs extravagantly. Each man was sure he had the pick of the class.

Wizard and the other dogs had just gone through some three months' training with our instructor. He had learned to walk in the light harness with the U-shaped handle, pause at curbs, stop for passing automobiles, and pay no attention to lampposts. He had also conceived a passionate adoration for the instructor.

On the fourth day when we first tried walking with our dogs in harness on the streets of Morristown, Wizard trotted beside me amiably enough, responding to the ten words used in command. But it soon became apparent that he was coöperating because ordered to do so by the instructor. As if I hadn't enough to do, it now dawned on me that I also had to show this dog I was the more desirable master. The fact that I fed and watered him didn't fool him a bit.

The instructor assured me that a definite day would come when Wizard would show himself my dog. The instructor would recognize that moment because Wizard would no longer be doing by rote what he had been trained to do but would be actively on guard for my safety, leading me around puddles, keeping me from hitting lampposts and mailboxes. This rapport between student and dog usually took about three weeks. Sometimes it never takes place, and then the student has failed.

Life was strenuous at Seeing Eye. We got up at 5:45 to take the dogs outdoors for curbing. The hearty breakfast served at seven was welcome. By eight we were on the streets practicing, our instructor taking us in pairs with our dogs. Then lunch. We always took our dogs to table as part of their training. They were supposed to lie perfectly still. But with 16 dogs in one dining hall, sudden eruptions were excitingly frequent. At one, we were back on the streets. Our day ended with the last visit of the dogs outdoors at eight.

With all those dogs tethered to our beds, things happened at night, too. A couple of them had the notion they were on some kind of guard duty and had to be cured of barking every time

anyone moved. The instructor got even less sleep than we did. There was always some student waking him because (a) the bed chain had broken and his dog was nowhere to be found, (b) his dog was on the bed and wouldn't let him get back into it, or (c) another job of housebreaking had to be done.

After spending a month at Seeing Eye, I can never subscribe to the belief that dogs don't think, if thought means the power to form judgments and retain memories. Dogs can become aware of responsibility and reason with this awareness as a basis.

However, certain breeds, with the exception of rare individuals, can simply never be trained for Seeing Eye work. The poodle is one. He can be taught everything a guide dog must know except one thing; responsibility for the master. Let him bring his blind master to the brink of, say, an open sidewalk elevator, and he will not disobey the order to go forward, or attempt to lead his master around the danger. He will take the order literally and jump it.

Pure blood, incidentally, is not one of Seeing Eye's norms; many a dog with a questionable grandfather makes the grade. Intelligence ranks high among the specifications, but, curiously, some dogs have altogether too much intelligence. After a week or two of training, such a dog evidently decides that this is too much like work and spends more time devising ways of getting out of his contract than of fulfilling it. The dogs who achieve the highest ratings are those who have intelligence tempered with a dog's version of social consciousness.

It has often been asked if Seeing Eye dogs actually realize their masters cannot see. The staff well knows that the dogs recognize the blind. As they lie sprawled in the recreation room, they don't change position when a sighted person steps close to them. But let a blind person approach and they pull their paws to safety or silently find another spot.

When Wizard made the discovery that I could not see, it meant he could play all kinds of tricks on me. He observed that I didn't know when I was at the end of a street until I touched the curb. So he would turn me neatly at a corner before taking me to the curb, thus deflecting me to the warmth of the bus station, or toward the automobile in which we had come from the school thus saving himself further practice.

Wizard's tricks marked a crucial point in my own training. Until now his attitude had been one of indifference. My classmates began having the same trouble, and we were disappointed and gloomy. The instructor knew what was happening, however. The time had come to administer discipline. Until then, we had not been allowed to use more than a mild, verbal reproof, although we were expected to give loud and extravagant praise when the dog did his job correctly. Now we were taught the word which is universally used in dog training as the sign of disapproval — the German expression "*Pfui*," sharply pronounced — and to give it authority by an expert tug on the leash. This was not punishment. Dogs are never punished; they are corrected. The correction must come instantly upon the realization by the master that the

dog is doing something wrong, and when the dog resumes doing things the correct way the praise must be unmistakable.

What makes the dog finally decide to assume full responsibility seems to be beyond human understanding. He will go to sleep under his master's bed at Seeing Eye one night without it and the next morning awaken with it. From that point on the master is safe. He can cross any street or proceed up the most crowded sidewalk with assurance. His period of training, except for a few technical pointers, is over. He is ready to go home.

Graduation at Seeing Eye is casual. There are no diplomas. We go to the Executive Offices to pay our bill, though. Now we meet a last manifestation of Seeing Eye's philosophy of sympathy without pity. Our dogs might as well be given to us for nothing, the discrepancy is so great between what they have cost and what we will pay. The cost is six or seven times what we will be charged, but we are told only the price to us: $150. The men who come for their second or third dogs pay $50. The cost to service men is $1.

Wizard is now my dog, or rather I am Wizard's man, but I can't say I am any hero to him. He insists upon regular mealtimes, and when I stay overlong on visits he doesn't hesitate to let me know that we should be going. When my temper flares he just sits on his broad bottom until it blows over. For some unfathomable reason he loves bars and is not helping my reputation by occasionally turning into one without an order from me.

The other day I was at an advertising agency discussing the probability of doing a certain radio script which, as we say in the business, was very commercial. Wizard lay quietly beside me on the floor, as he had been trained to do, for as long as he could, then got up, stretched, walked to a corner and unobtrusively threw up. His air indicated that although he was responsible for me he didn't have to like my material.

People still try to help us cross the street and we thank them politely. But I don't need their help any more. For Wizard has given me back the thing I value most — my independence.

The big burden of our lives is that everybody kind of expects us to do tricks. I am supposed to have learned something about dog training. Then why can't I teach Wizard to do things like walking erect and shaking hands? It's a simple principle, I am told; it rests upon the superiority of the human mind over the animal. I tried to apply that principle. I didn't succeed in teaching Wizard any tricks but how would you like to see me scratch my right ear with my left hind foot?

THE only real argument for marriage is that it remains the best method for getting acquainted. — Heywood Broun, *It Seems to Me* (Harcourt, Brace)

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